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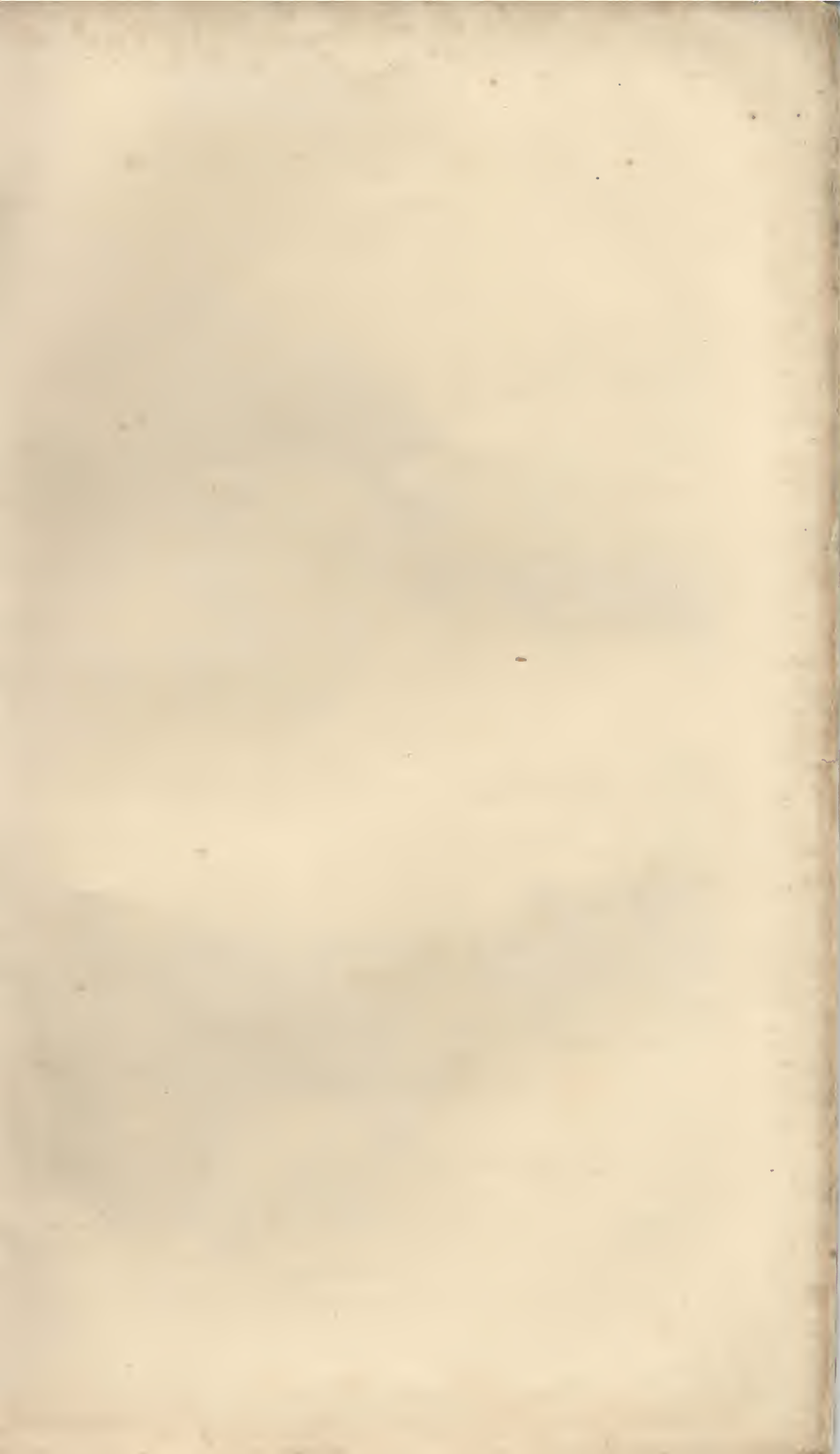
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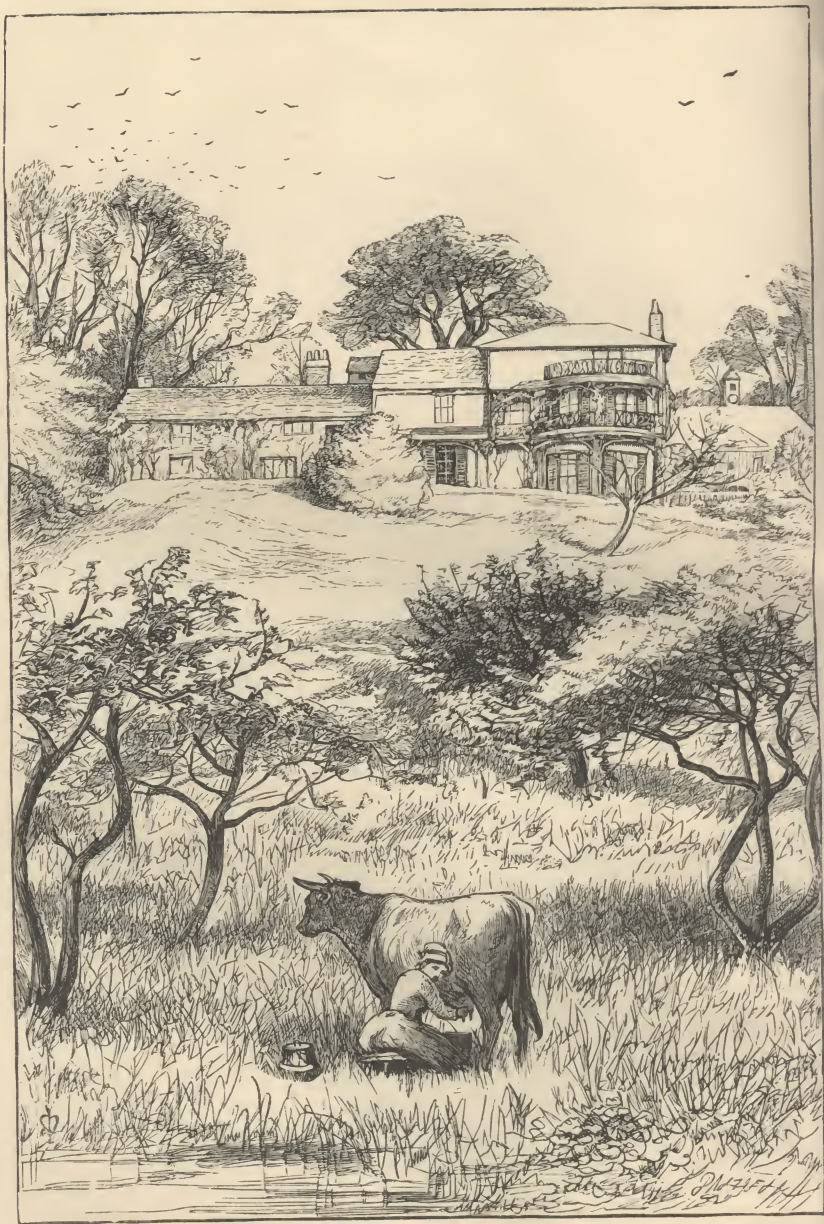


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ORLEY FARM.



SIR PEREGRINE AND HIS HEIR,

ORLEY FARM.

CHAPTER I.

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE GREAT ORLEY FARM CASE.

It is not true that a rose by any other name will smell as sweet. Were it true, I should call this story 'The Great Orley Farm Case.' But who would ask for the ninth number of a serial work burdened with so very uncouth an appellation? Thence, and therefore,—Orley Farm.

I say so much at commencing in order that I may have an opportunity of explaining that this book of mine will not be devoted in any special way to rural delights. The name might lead to the idea that new precepts were to be given, in the pleasant guise of a novel, as to cream-cheeses, pigs with small bones, wheat sown in drills, or artificial manure. No such aspirations are mine. I make no attempts in that line, and declare at once that agriculturists will gain nothing from my present performance. Orley Farm, my readers, will be our scene during a portion of our present sojourn together, but the name has been chosen as having been intimately connected with certain legal questions which made a considerable stir in our courts of law.

It was twenty years before the date at which this story will be supposed to commence that the name of Orley Farm first became known to the wearers of the long robe. At that time had died an old gentleman, Sir Joseph Mason, who left behind him a landed estate in Yorkshire of considerable extent and value. This he bequeathed, in a proper way, to his eldest son, the Joseph Mason, Esq., of our date. Sir Joseph had been a London merchant; had made his own money, having commenced the world, no doubt, with half a crown; had become, in turn, alderman, mayor, and knight; and in the fulness of time was gathered to his fathers. He had purchased this estate in Yorkshire late in life—we may as well become acquainted with the name, Groby Park—and his eldest son had lived there with such enjoyment of the privileges of an

English country gentleman as he had been able to master for himself. Sir Joseph had also had three daughters, full sisters of Joseph of Groby, whom he endowed sufficiently and gave over to three respective loving husbands. And then shortly before his death, three years or so, Sir Joseph had married a second wife, a lady forty-five years his junior, and by her he also left one son, an infant only two years old when he died.

For many years this prosperous gentleman had lived at a small country house, some five-and-twenty miles from London, called Orley Farm. This had been his first purchase of land, and he had never given up his residence there, although his wealth would have entitled him to the enjoyment of a larger establishment. On the birth of his youngest son, at which time his eldest was nearly forty years old, he made certain moderate provision for the infant, as he had already made moderate provision for his young wife; but it was then clearly understood by the eldest son that Orley Farm was to go with the Groby Park estate to him as the heir. When, however, Sir Joseph died, a codicil to his will, executed with due legal formalities, bequeathed Orley Farm to his youngest son, little Lucius Mason.

Then commenced those legal proceedings which at last developed themselves into the great Orley Farm Case. The eldest son contested the validity of the codicil; and indeed there were some grounds on which it appeared feasible that he should do so. This codicil not only left Orley Farm away from him to baby Lucius, but also interfered in another respect with the previous will. It devised a sum of two thousand pounds to a certain Miriam Usbech, the daughter of one Jonathan Usbech who was himself the attorney who had attended upon Sir Joseph for the making out of this very will, and also of this very codicil. This sum of two thousand pounds was not, it is true, left away from the surviving Joseph, but was to be produced out of certain personal property which had been left by the first will to the widow. And then old Jonathan Usbech had died, while Sir Joseph Mason was still living.

All the circumstances of the trial need not be detailed here. It was clearly proved that Sir Joseph had during his whole life expressed his intention of leaving Orley Farm to his eldest son; that he was a man void of mystery, and not given to secrets in his money matters, and one very little likely to change his opinion on such subjects. It was proved that old Jonathan Usbech at the time in which the will was made was in very bad circumstances, both as regards money and health. His business had once not been bad, but he had eaten and drunk it, and at this period was feeble and penniless, overwhelmed both by gout and debt. He had for many years been much employed by Sir Joseph in money matters, and it was known that he was so employed almost up to the day of his

death. The question was whether he had been employed to make this codicil.

The body of the will was in the handwriting of the widow, as was also the codicil. It was stated by her at the trial that the words were dictated to her by Usbech in her husband's hearing, and that the document was then signed by her husband in the presence of them both, and also in the presence of two other persons—a young man employed by her husband as a clerk, and by a servant-maid. These two last, together with Mr. Usbech, were the three witnesses whose names appeared in the codicil. There had been no secrets between Lady Mason and her husband as to his will. She had always, she said, endeavoured to induce him to leave Orley Farm to her child from the day of the child's birth, and had at last succeeded. In agreeing to this Sir Joseph had explained to her, somewhat angrily, that he wished to provide for Usbech's daughter, and that now he would do so out of moneys previously intended for her, the widow, and not out of the estate which would go to his eldest son. To this she had assented without a word, and had written the codicil in accordance with the lawyer's dictation, he, the lawyer, suffering at the time from gout in his hand. Among other things Lady Mason proved that on the date of the signatures Mr. Usbech had been with Sir Joseph for sundry hours.

Then the young clerk was examined. He had, he said, witnessed in his time four, ten, twenty, and, under pressure, he confessed to as many as a hundred and twenty business signatures on the part of his employer, Sir Joseph. He thought he had witnessed a hundred and twenty, but would take his oath he had not witnessed a hundred and twenty-one. He did remember witnessing a signature of his master about the time specified by the date of the codicil, and he remembered the maid-servant also signing at the same time. Mr. Usbech was then present; but he did not remember Mr. Usbech having the pen in his hand. Mr. Usbech, he knew, could not write at that time, because of the gout; but he might, no doubt, have written as much as his own name. He swore to both the signatures—his own and his master's; and in cross-examination swore that he thought it probable that they might be forgeries. On re-examination he was confident that his own name, as there appearing, had been written by himself; but on re-cross-examination, he felt sure that there was something wrong. It ended in the judge informing him that his word was worth nothing, which was hard enough on the poor young man, seeing that he had done his best to tell all that he remembered. Then the servant-girl came into the witness-box. She was sure it was her own handwriting. She remembered being called in to write her name, and seeing the master write his. It had all been explained to her at the time, but she admitted that she had not

understood the explanation. She had also seen the clerk write his name, but she was not sure that she had seen Mr. Usbech write. Mr. Usbech had had a pen in his hand; she was sure of that.

The last witness was Miriam Usbech, then a very pretty, simple girl of seventeen. Her father had told her once that he hoped Sir Joseph would make provision for her. This had been shortly before her father's death. At her father's death she had been sent for to Orley Farm, and had remained there till Sir Joseph died. She had always regarded Sir Joseph and Lady Mason as her best friends. She had known Sir Joseph all her life, and did not think it unnatural that he should provide for her. She had heard her father say more than once that Lady Mason would never rest till the old gentleman had settled Orley Farm upon her son.

Not half the evidence taken has been given here, but enough probably for our purposes. The will and codicil were confirmed, and Lady Mason continued to live at the farm. Her evidence was supposed to have been excellently given, and to have been conclusive. She had seen the signature, and written the codicil, and could explain the motive. She was a woman of high character, of great talent, and of repute in the neighbourhood; and, as the judge remarked, there could be no possible reason for doubting her word. Nothing also could be simpler or prettier than the evidence of Miriam Usbech, as to whose fate and destiny people at the time expressed much sympathy. That stupid young clerk was responsible for the only weak part of the matter; but if he proved nothing on one side, neither did he prove anything on the other.

This was the commencement of the great Orley Farm Case, and having been then decided in favour of the infant it was allowed to slumber for nearly twenty years. The codicil was confirmed, and Lady Mason remained undisturbed in possession of the house, acting as guardian for her child till he came of age, and indeed for some time beyond that epoch. In the course of a page or two I shall beg my readers to allow me to introduce this lady to their acquaintance.

Miriam Usbech, of whom also we shall see something, remained at the farm under Lady Mason's care till she married a young attorney, who in process of time succeeded to such business as her father left behind him. She suffered some troubles in life before she settled down in the neighbouring country town as Mrs. Dockwrath, for she had had another lover, the stupid young clerk who had so villainously broken down in his evidence; and to this other lover, whom she had been unable to bring herself to accept, Lady Mason had given her favour and assistance. Poor Miriam was at that time a soft, mild-eyed girl, easy to be led, one would have said; but in this matter Lady Mason could not lead her. It was in vain to tell her that the character of young Dockwrath did not stand

high, and that young Kenneby, the clerk, should be promoted to all manner of good things. Soft and mild-eyed as Miriam was, Love was still the lord of all. In this matter she would not be persuaded; and eventually she gave her two thousand pounds to Samuel Dockwrath, the young attorney with the questionable character.

This led to no breach between her and her patroness. Lady Mason, wishing to do the best for her young friend, had favoured John Kenneby, but she was not a woman at all likely to quarrel on such a ground as this. 'Well, Miriam,' she had said, 'you must judge for yourself, of course, in such a matter as this. You know my regard for you.'

'Oh yes, ma'am,' said Miriam, eagerly.

'And I shall always be glad to promote your welfare as Mrs. Dockwrath, if possible. I can only say that I should have had more satisfaction in attempting to do so for you as Mrs. Kenneby.' But, in spite of the seeming coldness of these words, Lady Mason had been constant to her friend for many years, and had attended to her with more or less active kindness in all the sorrows arising from an annual baby and two sets of twins—a progeny which before the commencement of my tale reached the serious number of sixteen, all living.

Among other solid benefits conferred by Lady Mason had been the letting to Mr. Dockwrath of certain two fields, lying at the extremity of the farm property, and quite adjacent to the town of Hamworth in which old Mr. Usbech had resided. These had been let by the year, at a rent not considered to be too high at that period, and which had certainly become much lower in proportion to the value of the land, as the town of Hamworth had increased. On these fields Mr. Dockwrath expended some money, though probably not so much as he averred; and when noticed to give them up at the period of young Mason's coming of age, expressed himself terribly aggrieved.

'Surely, Mr. Dockwrath, you are very ungrateful,' Lady Mason had said to him. But he had answered her with disrespectful words; and hence had arisen an actual breach between her and poor Miriam's husband. 'I must say, Miriam, that Mr. Dockwrath is unreasonable,' Lady Mason had said. And what could a poor wife answer? 'Oh! Lady Mason, pray let it bide a time till it all comes right.' But it never did come right; and the affair of those two fields created the great Orley Farm Case, which it will be our business to unravel.

And now a word or two as to this Orley Farm. In the first place let it be understood that the estate consisted of two farms. One, called the Old Farm, was let to an old farmer named Greenwood, and had been let to him and to his father for many years antecedent to the

days of the Masons. Mr. Greenwood held about three hundred acres of land, paying with admirable punctuality over four hundred a year in rent, and was regarded by all the Orley people as an institution on the property. Then there was the farm-house and the land attached to it. This was the residence in which Sir Joseph had lived, keeping in his own hands this portion of the property. When first inhabited by him the house was not fitted for more than the requirements of an ordinary farmer, but he had gradually added to it and ornamented it till it was commodious, irregular, picturesque, and straggling. When he died, and during the occupation of his widow, it consisted of three buildings of various heights, attached to each other, and standing in a row. The lower contained a large kitchen, which had been the living-room of the farm-house, and was surrounded by bakehouse, laundry, dairy, and servants' room, all of fair dimensions. It was two stories high, but the rooms were low, and the roof steep and covered with tiles. The next portion had been added by Sir Joseph, then Mr. Mason, when he first thought of living at the place. This also was tiled, and the rooms were nearly as low; but there were three stories, and the building therefore was considerably higher. For five-and-twenty years the farm-house, so arranged, had sufficed for the common wants of Sir Joseph and his family; but when he determined to give up his establishment in the City, he added on another step to the house at Orley Farm. On this occasion he built a good dining-room, with a drawing-room over it, and bed-room over that; and this portion of the edifice was slated.

The whole stood in one line fronting on to a large lawn which fell steeply away from the house into an orchard at the bottom. This lawn was cut in terraces, and here and there upon it there stood apple-trees of ancient growth; for here had been the garden of the old farm-house. They were large, straggling trees, such as do not delight the eyes of modern gardeners; but they produced fruit by the bushel, very sweet to the palate, though probably not so perfectly round, and large, and handsome as those which the horticultural skill of the present day requires. The face of the house from one end to the other was covered with vines and passion-flowers, for the aspect was due south; and as the whole of the later addition was faced by a verandah, which also, as regarded the ground-floor, ran along the middle building, the place in summer was pretty enough. As I have said before, it was irregular and straggling, but at the same time roomy and picturesque. Such was Orley Farm-house.

There were about two hundred acres of land attached to it, together with a large old-fashioned farm-yard, standing not so far from the house as most gentlemen farmers might perhaps desire. The farm buildings, however, were well hidden, for Sir Joseph,

though he would at no time go to the expense of constructing all anew, had spent more money than such a proceeding would have cost him in doctoring existing evils and ornamenting the standing edifices. In doing this he had extended the walls of a brewhouse, and covered them with creepers, so as to shut out from the hall door the approach to the farm-yard, and had put up a quarter of a mile of high ornamental paling for the same purpose. He had planted an extensive shrubbery along the brow of the hill at one side of the house, had built summer-houses, and sunk a ha-ha fence below the orchard, and had contrived to give to the place the unmistakable appearance of an English gentleman's country-house. Nevertheless, Sir Joseph had never bestowed upon his estate, nor had it ever deserved, a more grandiloquent name than that which it had possessed of old.

Orley Farm-house itself is somewhat more than a mile distant from the town of Hamworth, but the land runs in the direction of the town, not skirting the high road, but stretching behind the cottages which stand along the pathway; and it terminates in those two fields respecting which Mr. Dockwraith the attorney became so irrationally angry at the period of which we are now immediately about to treat. These fields lie on the steep slope of Hamworth Hill, and through them runs the public path from the hamlet of Roxeth up to Hamworth church; for, as all the world knows, Hamworth church stands high, and is a landmark to the world for miles and miles around.

Within a circuit of thirty miles from London no land lies more beautifully circumstanced with regard to scenery than the country about Hamworth; and its most perfect loveliness commences just beyond the slopes of Orley Farm. There is a little village called Coldharbour, consisting of some half-dozen cottages, situated immediately outside Lady Mason's gate,—and it may as well be stated here that this gate is but three hundred yards from the house, and is guarded by no lodge. This village stands at the foot of Cleeve Hill. The land hereabouts ceases to be fertile, and breaks away into heath and common ground. Round the foot of the hill there are extensive woods, all of which belong to Sir Peregrine Orme, the lord of the manor. Sir Peregrine is not a rich man, not rich, that is, it being borne in mind that he is a baronet, that he represented his county in parliament for three or four sessions, and that his ancestors have owned The Cleeve estate for the last four hundred years; but he is by general repute the greatest man in these parts. We may expect to hear more of him also as the story makes its way.

I know many spots in England and in other lands, world-famous in regard to scenery, which to my eyes are hardly equal to Cleeve Hill. From the top of it you are told that you may see into seven counties; but to me that privilege never possessed any value. I

should not care to see into seventeen counties, unless the country which spread itself before my view was fair and lovely. The country which is so seen from Cleeve Hill is exquisitely fair and lovely;—very fair, with glorious fields of unsurpassed fertility, and lovely with oak woods and brown open heaths which stretch away, hill after hill, down towards the southern coast. I could greedily fill a long chapter with the well-loved glories of Cleeve Hill; but it may be that we must press its heather with our feet more than once in the course of our present task, and if so, it will be well to leave something for those coming visits.

‘Ungrateful! I’ll let her know whether I owe her any gratitude. Haven’t I paid her her rent every half-year as it came due? what more would she have? Ungrateful, indeed! She is one of those women who think that you ought to go down on your knees to them if they only speak civilly to you. I’ll let her know whether I’m ungrateful.’

These words were spoken by angry Mr. Samuel Dockwrath to his wife, as he stood up before his parlour-fire after breakfast, and the woman to whom he referred was Lady Mason. Mr. Samuel Dockwrath was very angry as he so spoke, or at any rate he seemed to be so. There are men who take a delight in abusing those special friends whom their wives best love, and Mr. Dockwrath was one of these. He had never given his cordial consent to the intercourse which had hitherto existed between the lady of Orley Farm and his household, although he had not declined the substantial benefits which had accompanied it. His pride had rebelled against the feeling of patronage, though his interest had submitted to the advantages thence derived. A family of sixteen children is a heavy burden for a country attorney with a small practice, even though his wife may have had a fortune of two thousand pounds; and thus Mr. Dockwrath, though he had never himself loved Lady Mason, had permitted his wife to accept all those numberless kindnesses which a lady with comfortable means and no children is always able to bestow on a favoured neighbour who has few means and many children. Indeed, he himself had accepted a great favour with reference to the holding of those two fields, and had acknowledged as much when first he took them into his hands some sixteen or seventeen years back. But all that was forgotten now; and having held them for so long a period, he bitterly felt the loss, and resolved that it would ill become him as a man and an attorney to allow so deep an injury to pass unnoticed. It may be, moreover, that Mr. Dockwrath was now doing somewhat better in the world than formerly, and that he could afford to give up Lady Mason, and to demand also that his wife should give her up. Those trumpery presents from Orley Farm were very well while he was struggling for bare bread but now, now that he had

turned the corner,—now that by his divine art and mystery of law he had managed to become master of that beautiful result of British perseverance, a balance at his banker's, he could afford to indulge his natural antipathy to a lady who had endeavoured in early life to divert from him the little fortune which had started him in the world.

Miriam Dockwrath, as she sat on this morning, listening to her husband's anger, with a sick little girl on her knee, and four or five others clustering round her, half covered with their matutinal bread and milk, was mild-eyed and soft as ever. Hers was a nature in which softness would ever prevail;—softness, and that tenderness of heart, always leaning, and sometimes almost crouching, of which a mild eye is the outward sign. But her comeliness and prettiness were gone. Female beauty of the sterner, grander sort may support the burden of sixteen children, all living,—and still survive. I have known it to do so, and to survive with much of its youthful glory. But that mild-eyed, soft, round, plumpy prettiness gives way beneath such a weight as that: years alone tell on it quickly; but children and limited means combined with years leave to it hardly a chance.

'I'm sure I'm very sorry,' said the poor woman, worn with her many cares.

'Sorry; yes, and I'll make her sorry, the proud minx. There's an old saying, that those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.'

'But, Samuel, I don't think she means to be doing you any harm. You know she always did say——. Don't, Bessy; how can you put your fingers into the basin in that way?'

'Sam has taken my spoon away, mamma.'

'I'll let her know whether she's doing any harm or no. And what signifies what was said sixteen years ago? Has she anything to show in writing? As far as I know, nothing of the kind was said.'

'Oh, I remember it, Samuel; I do indeed!'

'Let me tell you then that you had better not try to remember anything about it. If you ain't quiet, Bob, I'll make you, pretty quick; d'ye hear that? The fact is, your memory is not worth a curse. Where are you to get milk for all those children, do you think, when the fields are gone?'

'I'm sure I'm very sorry, Samuel.'

'Sorry; yes, and somebody else shall be sorry too. And look here, Miriam, I won't have you going up to Orley Farm on any pretence whatever; do you hear that?' and then, having given that imperative command to his wife and slave, the lord and master of that establishment walked forth into his office.

On the whole Miriam Usbech might have done better had she followed the advice of her patroness in early life, and married the stupid clerk.

CHAPTER II.

LADY MASON AND HER SON.

I TRUST that it is already perceived by all persistent novel readers that very much of the interest of this tale will be centred in the person of Lady Mason. Such educated persons, however, will probably be aware that she is not intended to be the heroine. The heroine, so called, must by a certain fixed law be young and marriageable. Some such heroine in some future number shall be forthcoming, with as much of the heroic about her as may be found convenient; but for the present let it be understood that the person and character of Lady Mason is as important to us as can be those of any young lady, let her be ever so gracious or ever so beautiful.

In giving the details of her history, I do not know that I need go back beyond her grandfather and grandmother, who were thoroughly respectable people in the hardware line; I speak of those relatives by the father's side. Her own parents had risen in the world,—had risen from retail to wholesale, and considered themselves for a long period of years to be good representatives of the commercial energy and prosperity of Great Britain. But a fall had come upon them,—as a fall does come very often to our excellent commercial representatives—and Mr. Johnson was in the 'Gazette.' It would be long to tell how old Sir Joseph Mason was concerned in these affairs, how he acted as the principal assignee, and how ultimately he took to his bosom as his portion of the assets of the estate, young Mary Johnson, and made her his wife and mistress of Orley Farm. Of the family of the Johnsons there were but three others, the father, the mother, and a brother. The father did not survive the disgrace of his bankruptcy, and the mother in process of time settled herself with her son in one of the Lancashire manufacturing towns, where John Johnson raised his head in business to some moderate altitude, Sir Joseph having afforded much valuable assistance. There for the present we will leave them.

I do not think that Sir Joseph ever repented of the perilous deed he did in marrying that young wife. His home for many years had been desolate and solitary; his children had gone from him, and

did not come to visit him very frequently in his poor home at the farm. They had become grander people than him, had been gifted with aspiring minds, and in every turn and twist which they took, looked to do something towards washing themselves clean from the dirt of the counting-house. This was specially the case with Sir Joseph's son, to whom the father had made over lands and money sufficient to enable him to come before the world as a country gentleman with a coat of arms on his coach-panel. It would be inconvenient for us to run off to Groby Park at the present moment, and I will therefore say no more just now as to Joseph junior, but will explain that Joseph senior was not made angry by this neglect. He was a grave, quiet, rational man, not however devoid of some folly; as indeed what rational man is so devoid? He was burdened with an ambition to establish a family as the result of his success in life; and having put forth his son into the world with these views, was content that that son should act upon them persistently. Joseph Mason, Esq., of Groby Park, in Yorkshire, was now a county magistrate, and had made some way towards a footing in the county society around him. With these hopes, and ambition such as this, it was probably not expedient that he should spend much of his time at Orley Farm. The three daughters were circumstanced much in the same way: they had all married gentlemen, and were bent on rising in the world: moreover, the steadfast resolution of purpose which characterized their father was known by them all,—and by their husbands: they had received their fortunes, with some settled contingencies to be forthcoming on their father's demise; why, then, trouble the old gentleman at Orley Farm?

Under such circumstances the old gentleman married his young wife,—to the great disgust of his four children. They of course declared to each other, corresponding among themselves by letter, that the old gentleman had positively disgraced himself. It was impossible that they should make any visits whatever to Orley Farm while such a mistress of the house was there;—and the daughters did make no such visits. Joseph, the son, whose monetary connection with his father was as yet by no means fixed and settled in its nature, did make one such visit, and then received his father's assurance—so at least he afterwards said and swore—that this marriage should by no means interfere with the expected inheritance of the Orley Farm acres. But at that time no young son had been born,—nor, probably, was any such young son expected.

The farm-house became a much brighter abode for the old man, for the few years which were left to him, after he had brought his young wife home. She was quiet, sensible, clever, and unremitting in her attention. She burthened him with no requests for gay society, and took his home as she found it, making the best of it

for herself, and making it for him much better than he had ever hitherto known it. His own children had always looked down upon him, regarding him merely as a coffer from whence money might be had; and he, though he had never resented this contempt, had in a certain measure been aware of it. But there was no such feeling shown by his wife. She took the benefits which he gave her graciously and thankfully, and gave back to him in return, certainly her care and time, and apparently her love. For herself, in the way of wealth and money, she never asked for anything.

And then the baby had come, young Lucius Mason, and there was of course great joy at Orley Farm. The old father felt that the world had begun again for him, very delightfully, and was more than ever satisfied with his wisdom in regard to that marriage. But the very genteel progeny of his early youth were more than ever dissatisfied, and in their letters among themselves dealt forth harder and still harder words upon poor Sir Joseph. What terrible things might he not be expected to do now that his dotage was coming on? Those three married ladies had no selfish fears—so at least they declared, but they united in imploring their brother to look after his interests at Orley Farm. How dreadfully would the young heir of Groby be curtailed in his dignities and seignories if it should be found at the last day that Orley Farm was not to be written in his rent-roll!

And then, while they were yet bethinking themselves how they might best bestir themselves, news arrived that Sir Joseph had suddenly died. Sir Joseph was dead, and the will when read contained a codicil by which that young brat was made the heir to the Orley Farm estate. I have said that Lady Mason during her married life had never asked of her husband anything for herself; but in the law proceedings which were consequent upon Sir Joseph's death, it became abundantly evident that she had asked him for much for her son,—and that she had been specific in her requests, urging him to make a second heir, and to settle Orley Farm upon her own boy, Lucius. She herself stated that she had never done this except in the presence of a third person. She had often done so in the presence of Mr. Usbech the attorney,—as to which Mr. Usbech was not alive to testify; and she had also done so more than once in the presence of Mr. Furnival, a barrister,—as to which Mr. Furnival, being alive, did testify—very strongly.

As to that contest nothing further need now be said. It resulted in the favour of young Lucius Mason, and therefore, also, in the favour of the widow;—in the favour moreover of Miriam Usbech, and thus ultimately in the favour of Mr. Samuel Dockwrath, who is now showing himself to be so signally ungrateful. Joseph Mason, however, retired from the battle nothing convinced. His father, he said, had been an old fool, an ass, an idiot, a vulgar,

ignorant fool; but he was not a man to break his word. That signature to the codicil might be his or might not. If his, it had been obtained by fraud. What could be easier than to cheat an old doting fool? Many men agreed with Joseph Mason, thinking that Usbech the attorney had perpetrated this villainy on behalf of his daughter; but Joseph Mason would believe, or say that he believed—a belief in which none but his sisters joined him,—that Lady Mason herself had been the villain. He was minded to press the case on to a Court of Appeal, up even to the House of Lords; but he was advised that in doing so he would spend more money than Orley Farm was worth, and that he would, almost to a certainty, spend it in vain. Under this advice he cursed the laws of his country, and withdrew to Groby Park.

Lady Mason had earned the respect of all those around her by the way in which she bore herself in the painful days of the trial, and also in those of her success,—especially also by the manner in which she gave her evidence. And thus, though she had not been much noticed by her neighbours during the short period of her married life, she was visited as a widow by many of the more respectable people round Hamworth. In all this she showed no feeling of triumph; she never abused her husband's relatives, or spoke much of the harsh manner in which she had been used. Indeed, she was not given to talk about her own personal affairs; and although, as I have said, many of her neighbours visited her, she did not lay herself out for society. She accepted and returned their attention, but for the most part seemed to be willing that the matter should so rest. The people around by degrees came to know her ways; they spoke to her when they met her, and occasionally went through the ceremony of a morning call; but did not ask her to their tea-parties, and did not expect to see her at picnic and archery meetings.

Among those who took her by the hand in the time of her great trouble was Sir Peregrine Orme of The Cleeve,—for such was the name which had belonged time out of mind to his old mansion and park. Sir Peregrine was a gentleman now over seventy years of age, whose family consisted of the widow of his only son, and the only son of that widow, who was of course the heir to his estate and title. Sir Peregrine was an excellent old man, as I trust may hereafter be acknowledged; but his regard for Lady Mason was perhaps in the first instance fostered by his extreme dislike to her stepson, Joseph Mason of Groby. Mr. Joseph Mason of Groby was quite as rich a man as Sir Peregrine, and owned an estate which was nearly as large as The Cleeve property; but Sir Peregrine would not allow that he was a gentleman, or that he could by any possible transformation become one. He had not probably ever said so in direct words to any of the Mason family, but his opinion

on the matter had in some way worked its way down to Yorkshire, and therefore there was no love to spare between these two county magistrates. There had been a slight acquaintance between Sir Peregrine and Sir Joseph; but the ladies of the two families had never met till after the death of the latter. Then, while that trial was still pending, Mrs. Orme had come forward at the instigation of her father-in-law, and by degrees there had grown up an intimacy between the two widows. When the first offers of assistance were made and accepted, Sir Peregrine no doubt did not at all dream of any such result as this. His family pride, and especially the pride which he took in his widowed daughter-in-law, would probably have been shocked by such a surmise; but, nevertheless, he had seen the friendship grow and increase without alarm. He himself had become attached to Lady Mason, and had gradually learned to excuse in her that want of gentle blood and early breeding which as a rule he regarded as necessary to a gentleman, and from which alone, as he thought, could spring many of those excellences which go to form the character of a lady.

It may therefore be asserted that Lady Mason's widowed life was successful. That it was prudent and well conducted no one could doubt. Her neighbours of course did say of her that she would not drink tea with Mrs. Arkwright of Mount Pleasant villa because she was allowed the privilege of entering Sir Peregrine's drawing-room; but such little scandal as this was a matter of course. Let one live according to any possible or impossible rule, yet some offence will be given in some quarter. Those who knew anything of Lady Mason's private life were aware that she did not encroach on Sir Peregrine's hospitality. She was not at The Cleeve as much as circumstances would have justified, and at one time by no means so much as Mrs. Orme would have desired.

In person she was tall and comely. When Sir Joseph had brought her to his house she had been very fair,—tall, slight, fair, and very quiet,—not possessing that loveliness which is generally most attractive to men, because the beauty of which she might boast depended on form rather than on the brightness of her eye, or the softness of her cheek and lips. Her face too, even at that age, seldom betrayed emotion, and never showed signs either of anger or of joy. Her forehead was high, and though somewhat narrow, nevertheless gave evidence of considerable mental faculties; nor was the evidence false, for those who came to know Lady Mason well, were always ready to acknowledge that she was a woman of no ordinary power. Her eyes were large and well formed, but somewhat cold. Her nose was long and regular. Her mouth also was very regular, and her teeth perfectly beautiful; but her lips were straight and thin. It would sometimes seem that she was all teeth, and yet it is certain that she never made an effort

to show them. The great fault of her face was in her chin, which was too small and sharp, thus giving on occasions something of meanness to her countenance. She was now forty-seven years of age, and had a son who had reached man's estate; and yet perhaps she had more of woman's beauty at this present time than when she stood at the altar with Sir Joseph Mason. The quietness and repose of her manner suited her years and her position; age had given fulness to her tall form; and the habitual sadness of her countenance was in fair accordance with her condition and character. And yet she was not really sad,—at least so said those who knew her. The melancholy was in her face rather than in her character, which was full of energy,—if energy may be quiet as well as assured and constant.

Of course she had been accused a dozen times of matrimonial prospects. What handsome widow is not so accused? The world of Hamworth had been very certain at one time that she was intent on marrying Sir Peregrine Orme. But she had not married, and I think I may say on her behalf that she had never thought of marrying. Indeed, one cannot see how such a woman could make any effort in that line. It was impossible to conceive that a lady so staid in her manner should be guilty of flirting; nor was there any man within ten miles of Hamworth who would have dared to make the attempt. Women for the most part are prone to love-making—as nature has intended that they should be; but there are women from whom all such follies seem to be as distant as skittles and beer are distant from the dignity of the Lord Chancellor. Such a woman was Lady Mason.

At this time—the time which is about to exist for us as the period at which our narrative will begin—Lucius Mason was over twenty-two years old, and was living at the farm. He had spent the last three or four years of his life in Germany, where his mother had visited him every year, and had now come home intending to be the master of his own destiny. His mother's care for him during his boyhood, and up to the time at which he became of age, had been almost elaborate in its thoughtfulness. She had consulted Sir Peregrine as to his school, and Sir Peregrine, looking to the fact of the lad's own property, and also to the fact, known by him, of Lady Mason's means for such a purpose, had recommended Harrow. But the mother had hesitated, had gently discussed the matter, and had at last persuaded the baronet that such a step would be injudicious. The boy was sent to a private school of a high character, and Sir Peregrine was sure that he had been so sent at his own advice. 'Looking at the peculiar position of his mother,' said Sir Peregrine to his young daughter-in-law, 'at her very peculiar position, and that of his relatives, I think it will be better that he should not appear to assume anything early in life; nothing can be

better conducted than Mr. Crabfield's establishment, and after much consideration I have had no hesitation in recommending her to send her son to him.' And thus Lucius Mason had been sent to Mr. Crabfield, but I do not think that the idea originated with Sir Peregrine.

'And perhaps it will be as well,' added the baronet, 'that he and Perry should not be together at school, though I have no objection to their meeting in the holidays. Mr. Crabfield's vacations are always timed to suit the Harrow holidays.' The Perry here mentioned was the grandson of Sir Peregrine—the young Peregrine who in coming days was to be the future lord of The Cleeve. When Lucius Mason was modestly sent to Mr. Crabfield's establishment at Great Marlow, young Peregrine Orme, with his prouder hopes, commenced his career at the public school.

Mr. Crabfield did his duty by Lucius Mason, and sent him home at seventeen a handsome, well-mannered lad, tall and comely to the eye, with soft brown whiskers sprouting on his cheek, well grounded in Greek, Latin, and Euclid, grounded also in French, and Italian, and possessing many more acquirements than he would have learned at Harrow. But added to these, or rather consequent on them, was a conceit which public-school education would not have created. When their mothers compared them in the holidays, not openly with outspoken words, but silently in their hearts, Lucius Mason was found by each to be the superior both in manners and knowledge; but each acknowledged also that there was more of ingenuous boyhood about Peregrine Orme.

Peregrine Orme was a year the younger, and therefore his comparative deficiencies were not the cause of any intense sorrow at The Cleeve; but his grandfather would probably have been better satisfied—and perhaps also so would his mother—had he been less addicted to the catching of rats, and better inclined towards Miss Edgeworth's novels and Shakspeare's plays, which were earnestly recommended to him by the lady and the gentleman. But boys generally are fond of rats, and very frequently are not fond of reading; and therefore, all this having been duly considered, there was not much deep sorrow in those days at The Cleeve as to the boyhood of the heir.

But there was great pride at Orley Farm, although that pride was shown openly to no one. Lady Mason in her visits at The Cleeve said but little as to her son's present excellences. As to his future career in life she did say much both to Sir Peregrine and to Mrs. Orme, asking the council of the one and expressing her fears to the other; and then, Sir Peregrine having given his consent, she sent the lad to Germany.

He was allowed to come of age without any special signs of manhood, or aught of the glory of property; although, in his case,

that coming of age did put him into absolute possession of his inheritance. On that day, had he been so minded, he could have turned his mother out of the farm-house, and taken exclusive possession of the estate; but he did in fact remain in Germany for a year beyond this period, and returned to Orley Farm only in time to be present at the celebration of the twenty-first birthday of his friend Peregrine Orme. This ceremony, as may be surmised, was by no means slurred over without due rejoicing. The heir at the time was at Christchurch; but at such a period a slight interruption to his studies was not to be lamented. There had been Sir Peregrine Ormes in those parts ever since the days of James I.; and indeed in days long antecedent to those there had been knights bearing that name, some of whom had been honourably beheaded for treason, others imprisoned for heresy; and one made away with on account of a supposed royal amour,—to the great glorification of all his descendants. Looking to the antecedents of the family, it was only proper that the coming of age of the heir should be duly celebrated; but Lucius Mason had had no antecedents; no great-great-grandfather of his had knelt at the feet of an improper princess; and therefore Lady Mason, though she had been at The Cleeve, had not mentioned the fact that on that very day her son had become a man. But when Peregrine Orme became a man—though still in his manhood too much devoted to rats—she gloried greatly in her quiet way, and whispered a hope into the baronet's ear that the young heir would not imitate the ambition of his ancestor. 'No, by Jove! it would not do now at all,' said Sir Peregrine, by no means displeased at the allusion.

And then that question as to the future life of Lucius Mason became one of great importance, and it was necessary to consult, not only Sir Peregrine Orme, but the young man himself. His mother had suggested to him first the law: the great Mr. Furnival, formerly of the home circuit, but now practising only in London, was her very special friend, and would give her and her son all possible aid in this direction. And what living man could give better aid than the great Mr. Furnival? But Lucius Mason would have none of the law. This resolve he pronounced very clearly while yet in Germany, whither his mother visited him, bearing with her a long letter written by the great Mr. Furnival himself. But nevertheless young Mason would have none of the law. 'I have an idea,' he said, 'that lawyers are all liars.' Whereupon his mother rebuked him for his conceited ignorance and want of charity; but she did not gain her point.

She had, however, another string to her bow. As he objected to be a lawyer, he might become a civil engineer. Circumstances had made Sir Peregrine Orme very intimate with the great Mr. Brown. Indeed, Mr. Brown was under great obligations to Sir Peregrine,

and Sir Peregrine had promised to use his influence. But Lucius Mason said that civil engineers were only tradesmen of an upper class, tradesmen with intellects; and he, he said, wished to use his intellect, but he did not choose to be a tradesman. His mother rebuked him again, as he well deserved that she should,—and then asked him of what profession he himself had thought. ‘Philology,’ said he; ‘or as a profession, perhaps literature. I shall devote myself to philology and the races of man. Nothing considerable has been done with them as a combined pursuit.’ And with these views he returned home,—while Peregrine Orme at Oxford was still addicted to the hunting of rats.

But with philology and the races of man he consented to combine the pursuit of agriculture. When his mother found that he wished to take up his abode in his own house, she by no means opposed him, and suggested that, as such was his intention, he himself should farm his own land. He was very ready to do this, and had she not represented that such a step was in every way impolitic, he would willingly have requested Mr. Greenwood of the Old Farm to look elsewhere, and have spread himself and his energies over the whole domain. As it was he contented himself with desiring that Mr. Dockwrath would vacate his small holding, and as he was imperative as to that his mother gave way without making it the cause of a battle. She would willingly have left Mr. Dockwrath in possession, and did say a word or two as to the milk necessary for those sixteen children. But Lucius Mason was ducal in his ideas, and intimated an opinion that he had a right to do what he liked with his own. Had not Mr. Dockwrath been told, when the fields were surrendered to him as a favour, that he would only have them in possession till the heir should come of age? Mr. Dockwrath had been so told; but tellings such as these are easily forgotten by men with sixteen children. And thus Mr. Mason became an agriculturist with special scientific views as to chemistry, and a philologist with the object of making that pursuit bear upon his studies with reference to the races of man. He was convinced that by certain admixtures of ammonia and earths he could produce cereal results hitherto unknown to the farming world, and that by tracing out the roots of words he could trace also the wanderings of man since the expulsion of Adam from the garden. As to the latter question his mother was not inclined to contradict him. Seeing that he would sit at the feet neither of Mr. Furnival nor of Mr. Brown, she had no objection to the races of man. She could endure to be talked to about the Oceanic Mongolidæ and the Iapetidæ of the Indo-Germanic class, and had perhaps her own ideas that such matters, though somewhat foggy, were better than rats. But when he came to the other subject, and informed her that the properly plentiful feeding of the world was only kept waiting for the

chemists, she certainly did have her fears. Chemical agriculture is expensive; and though the results may possibly be remunerative, still, while we are thus kept waiting by the backwardness of the chemists, there must be much risk in making any serious expenditure with such views.

‘Mother,’ he said, when he had now been at home about three months, and when the fiat for the expulsion of Samuel Dockwrath had already gone forth, ‘I shall go to Liverpool to-morrow.’

‘To Liverpool, Lucius?’

‘Yes. That guano which I got from Walker is adulterated. I have analyzed it, and find that it does not contain above thirty-two and a half hundredths of—of that which it ought to hold in a proportion of seventy-five per cent. of the whole.’

‘Does it not?’

‘No; and it is impossible to obtain results while one is working with such fictitious materials. Look at that bit of grass at the bottom of Greenwood’s Hill.’

‘The fifteen-acre field? Why, Lucius, we always had the heaviest crops of hay in the parish off that meadow.’

‘That’s all very well, mother; but you have never tried,—nobody about here ever has tried, what the land can really produce. I will throw that and the three fields beyond it into one; I will get Greenwood to let me have that bit of the hill-side, giving him compensation of course—’

‘And then Dockwrath would want compensation.’

‘Dockwrath is an impertinent rascal, and I shall take an opportunity of telling him so. But as I was saying, I will throw those seventy acres together, and then I will try what will be the relative effects of guano and the patent blood. But I must have real guano, and so I shall go to Liverpool.’

‘I think I would wait a little, Lucius. It is almost too late for any change of that kind this year.’

‘Wait! Yes, and what has come of waiting? We don’t wait at all in doubling our population every thirty-three years; but when we come to the feeding of them we are always for waiting. It is that waiting which has reduced the intellectual development of one half of the human race to its present terribly low state—or rather prevented its rising in a degree proportionate to the increase of the population. No more waiting for me, mother, if I can help it.’

‘But, Lucius, should not such new attempts as that be made by men with large capital?’ said the mother.

‘Capital is a bugbear,’ said the son, speaking on this matter quite *ex cathedra*, as no doubt he was entitled to do by his extensive reading at a German university—‘capital is a bugbear. The capital that is really wanting is thought, mind, combination, knowledge.’

‘But, Lucius—’

‘Yes, I know what you are going to say, mother. I don’t boast that I possess all these things; but I do say that I will endeavour to obtain them.’

‘I have no doubt you will; but should not that come first?’

‘That is waiting again. We all know as much as this, that good manure will give good crops if the sun be allowed full play upon the land, and nothing but the crop be allowed to grow. That is what I shall attempt at first, and there can be no great danger in that.’ And so he went to Liverpool.

Lady Mason during his absence began to regret that she had not left him in the undisturbed and inexpensive possession of the Mongolidæ and the Iapetidæ. His rent from the estate, including that which she would have paid him as tenant of the smaller farm, would have enabled him to live with all comfort; and, if such had been his taste, he might have become a philosophical student, and lived respectably without adding anything to his income by the sweat of his brow. But now the matter was likely to become serious enough. For a gentleman farmer determined to wait no longer for the chemists, whatever might be the results, an immediate profitable return per acre could not be expected as one of them. Any rent from that smaller farm would now be out of the question, and it would be well if the payments made so punctually by old Mr. Greenwood were not also swallowed up in the search after unadulterated guano. Who could tell whether in the pursuit of science he might not insist on chartering a vessel, himself, for the Peruvian coast?

CHAPTER III.

THE CLEEVE.

I HAVE said that Sir Peregrine Orme was not a rich man, meaning thereby that he was not a rich man considering his acknowledged position in the county. Such men not uncommonly have their tens, twelves, and twenty thousands a year; but Sir Peregrine's estate did not give him above three or four. He was lord of the manor of Hamworth, and possessed seignorial rights, or rather the skeleton and remembrance of such rights with reference to a very large district of country; but his actual property—that from which he still received the substantial benefits of ownership—was not so large as those of some of his neighbours. There was, however, no place within the county which was so beautifully situated as The Cleeve, or which had about it so many of the attractions of age. The house itself had been built at two periods,—a new set of rooms having been added to the remains of the old Elizabethan structure in the time of Charles II. It had not about it anything that was peculiarly grand or imposing, nor were the rooms large or even commodious; but everything was old, venerable, and picturesque. Both the dining-room and the library were panelled with black wainscoating; and though the drawing-rooms were papered, the tall, elaborately-worked wooden chimney-pieces still stood in them, and a wooden band or belt round the rooms showed that the panels were still there, although hidden by the modern paper.

But it was for the beauty and wildness of its grounds that The Cleeve was remarkable. The land fell here and there into narrow, wild ravines and woody crevices. The soil of the park was not rich, and could give but little assistance to the chemists in supplying the plentiful food expected by Mr. Mason for the coming multitudes of the world; it produced in some parts heather instead of grass, and was as wild and unprofitable as Cleeve Common, which stretched for miles outside the park palings; but it seemed admirably adapted for deer and for the maintenance of half-decayed venerable oaks. Young timber also throve well about the place, and in this respect Sir Peregrine was a careful landlord. There ran a river through the park,—the River Cleeve, from which the place and parish are said to have taken their names;—a river, or rather a

stream, very narrow and inconsiderable as to its volume of water, but which passed for some two miles through so narrow a passage as to give to it the appearance of a cleft or fissure in the rocks. The water tumbled over stones through this entire course, making it seem to be fordable almost everywhere without danger of wet feet; but in truth there was hardly a spot at which it could be crossed without a bold leap from rock to rock. Narrow as was the aperture through which the water had cut its way, nevertheless a path had been contrived, now on one side of the stream and now on the other, crossing it here and there by slight hanging wooden bridges. The air here was always damp with spray, and the rocks on both sides were covered with long mosses, as were also the overhanging boughs of the old trees. This place was the glory of The Cleeve, and as far as picturesque beauty goes it was very glorious. There was a spot in the river from whence a steep path led down from the park to the water, and at this spot the deer would come to drink. I know nothing more beautiful than this sight, when three or four of them could be so seen from one of the wooden bridges towards the hour of sunset in the autumn.

Sir Peregrine himself at this time was an old man, having passed his seventieth year. He was a fine, handsome English gentleman with white hair, keen gray eyes, a nose slightly aquiline, and lips now too closely pressed together in consequence of the havoc which time had made among his teeth. He was tall, but had lost something of his height from stooping,—was slight in his form, but well made, and vain of the smallness of his feet and the whiteness of his hands. He was generous, quick tempered, and opinionated; generally very mild to those who would agree with him and submit to him, but intolerant of contradiction, and conceited as to his experience of the world and the wisdom which he had thence derived. To those who were manifestly his inferiors he was affable, to his recognized equals he was courteous, to women he was almost always gentle;—but to men who claimed an equality which he would not acknowledge, he could make himself particularly disagreeable. In judging the position which a man should hold in the world, Sir Peregrine was very resolute in ignoring all claims made by wealth alone. Even property in land could not in his eyes create a gentleman. A gentleman, according to his ideas, should at any rate have great-grandfathers capable of being traced in the world's history; and the greater the number of such, and the more easily traceable they might be on the world's surface, the more unquestionable would be the status of the claimant in question. Such being the case, it may be imagined that Joseph Mason, Esq., of Groby Park did not rank high in the estimation of Sir Peregrine Orme.

I have said that Sir Peregrine was fond of his own opinion;

but nevertheless he was a man whom it was by no means difficult to lead. In the first place he was singularly devoid of suspicion. The word of a man or of a woman was to him always credible, until full proof had come home to him that it was utterly unworthy of credit. After that such a man or woman might as well spare all speech as regards the hope of any effect on the mind of Sir Peregrine Orme. He did not easily believe a fellow-creature to be a liar, but a liar to him once was a liar always. And then he was amenable to flattery, and few that are so are proof against the leading-strings of their flatterers. All this was well understood of Sir Peregrine by those about him. His gardener, his groom, and his woodman all knew his foibles. They all loved him, respected him, and worked for him faithfully; but each of them had his own way in his own branch.

And there was another person at The Cleeve who took into her own hands a considerable share of the management and leading of Sir Peregrine, though, in truth, she made no efforts in that direction. This was Mrs. Orme, the widow of his only child, and the mother of his heir. Mrs. Orme was a younger woman than Mrs. Mason of Orley Farm by nearly five years, though her son was but twelve months junior to Lucius Mason. She had been the daughter of a brother baronet, whose family was nearly as old as that of the Ormes; and therefore, though she had come penniless to her husband, Sir Peregrine had considered that his son had married well. She had been a great beauty, very small in size and delicate of limb, fair haired, with soft blue wondering eyes, and a dimpled cheek. Such she had been when young Peregrine Orme brought her home to The Cleeve, and the bride at once became the darling of her father-in-law. One year she had owned of married joy, and then all the happiness of the family had been utterly destroyed, and for the few following years there had been no sadder household in all the country-side than that of Sir Peregrine Orme. His son, his only son, the pride of all who knew him, the hope of his political party in the county, the brightest among the bright ones of the day for whom the world was just opening her richest treasures, fell from his horse as he was crossing into a road, and his lifeless body was brought home to The Cleeve.

All this happened now twenty years since, but the widow still wears the colours of mourning. Of her also the world of course said that she would soon console herself with a second love; but she too has given the world the lie. From that day to the present she has never left the house of her father-in-law; she has been a true child to him, and she has enjoyed all a child's privileges. There has been but little favour for any one at The Cleeve who has been considered by the baronet to disregard the wishes of the mistress of the establishment. Any word from her has been

law to him, and he has of course expected also that her word should be law to others. He has yielded to her in all things, and attended to her will as though she were a little queen, recognizing in her feminine weakness a sovereign power, as some men can and do; and having thus for years indulged himself in a quixotic gallantry to the lady of his household, he has demanded of others that they also should bow the knee.

During the last twenty years The Cleeve has not been a gay house. During the last ten those living there have been contented, and in the main happy; but there has seldom been many guests in the old hall, and Sir Peregrine has not been fond of going to other men's feasts. He inherited the property very early in life, and then there were on it some few encumbrances. While yet a young man he added something to these, and now, since his own son's death, he has been setting his house in order, that his grandson should receive the family acres intact. Every shilling due on the property has been paid off; and it is well that this should be so, for there is reason to fear that the heir will want a helping hand out of some of youth's difficulties,—perhaps once or twice before his passion for rats gives place to a good English gentlemanlike resolve to hunt twice a week, look after his timber, and live well within his means.

The chief fault in the character of young Peregrine Orme was that he was so young. There are men who are old at one-and-twenty,—are quite fit for Parliament, the magistrate's bench, the care of a wife, and even for that much sterner duty, the care of a balance at the bankers; but there are others who at that age are still boys,—whose inner persons and characters have not begun to clothe themselves with the 'toga virilis.' I am not sure that those whose boyhoods are so protracted have the worst of it, if in this hurrying and competitive age they can be saved from being absolutely trampled in the dust before they are able to do a little trampling on their own account. Fruit that grows ripe the quickest is not the sweetest; nor when housed and garnered will it keep the longest. For young Peregrine there was no need of competitive struggles. The days have not yet come, though they are no doubt coming, when 'detur digniori' shall be the rule of succession to all titles, honours, and privileges whatsoever. Only think what a lift it would give to the education of the country in general, if any lad from seventeen to twenty-one could go in for a vacant dukedom; and if a goodly inheritance could be made absolutely incompatible with incorrect spelling and doubtful proficiency in rule of three!

Luckily for Peregrine junior these days are not yet at hand, or I fear that there would be little chance for him. While Lucius Mason was beginning to think that the chemists might be hurried, and that agriculture might be beneficially added to philology, our

friend Peregrine had just been rusticated, and the head of his college had intimated to the baronet that it would be well to take the young man's name off the college books. This accordingly had been done, and the heir of The Cleeve was at present at home with his mother and grandfather. What special act of grace had led to this severity we need not inquire, but we may be sure that the frolics of which he had been guilty had been essentially young in their nature. He had assisted in driving a farmer's sow into the man's best parlour, or had daubed the top of the tutor's cap with white paint, or had perhaps given liberty to a bag full of rats in the college hall at dinner-time. Such were the youth's academical amusements, and as they were pursued with unremitting energy it was thought well that he should be removed from Oxford.

Then had come the terrible question of his university bills. One after another, half a score of them reached Sir Peregrine, and then took place that terrible interview,—such as most young men have had to undergo at least once,—in which he was asked how he intended to absolve himself from the pecuniary liabilities which he had incurred.

‘I am sure I don't know,’ said young Orme, sadly.

‘But I shall be glad, sir, if you will favour me with your intentions,’ said Sir Peregrine, with severity. ‘A gentleman does not, I presume, send his orders to a tradesman without having some intention of paying him for his goods.’

‘I intended that they should all be paid, of course.’

‘And how, sir? by whom?’

‘Well, sir,—I suppose I intended that you should pay them;’ and the scapegrace as he spoke looked full up into the baronet's face with his bright blue eyes,—not impudently, as though defying his grandfather, but with a bold confidence which at once softened the old man's heart.

Sir Peregrine turned away and walked twice the length of the library; then, returning to the spot where the other stood, he put his hand on his grandson's shoulder. ‘Well, Peregrine, I will pay them,’ he said. ‘I have no doubt that you did so intend when you incurred them;—and that was perhaps natural. I will pay them; but for your own sake, and for your dear mother's sake, I hope that they are not very heavy. Can you give me a list of all that you owe?’

Young Peregrine said that he thought he could, and sitting down at once he made a clean breast of it. With all his foibles, follies, and youthful ignorances, in two respects he stood on good ground. He was neither false nor a coward. He continued to scrawl down items as long as there were any of which he could think, and then handed over the list in order that his grandfather might add them up. It was the last he ever heard of the matter; and when he revisited Oxford some twelve months afterwards, the tradesmen whom

he had honoured with his custom bowed to him as low as though he had already inherited twenty thousand a year.

Peregrine Orme was short in stature as was his mother, and he also had his mother's wonderfully bright blue eyes; but in other respects he was very like his father and grandfather;—very like all the Ormes who had lived for ages past. His hair was light; his forehead was not large, but well formed and somewhat prominent; his nose had something, though not much, of the eagle's beak; his mouth was handsome in its curve, and his teeth were good, and his chin was divided by a deep dimple. His figure was not only short, but stouter than that of the Ormes in general. He was very strong on his legs; he could wrestle, and box, and use the single-stick with a quickness and precision that was the terror of all the freshmen who had come in his way.

Mrs. Orme, his mother, no doubt thought that he was perfect. Looking at the reflex of her own eyes in his, and seeing in his face so sweet a portraiture of the nose and mouth and forehead of him whom she had loved so dearly and lost so soon, she could not but think him perfect. When she was told that the master of Lazarus had desired that her son should be removed from his college, she had accused the tyrant of unrelenting, persecuting tyranny; and the gentle arguments of Sir Peregrine had no effect towards changing her ideas. On that disagreeable matter of the bills little or nothing was said to her. Indeed, money was a subject with which she was never troubled. Sir Peregrine conceived that money was a man's business, and that the softness of a woman's character should be preserved by a total absence of all pecuniary thoughts and cares.

And then there arose at The Cleeve a question as to what should immediately be done with the heir. He himself was by no means so well prepared with an answer as had been his friend Lucius Mason. When consulted by his grandfather, he said that he did not know. He would do anything that Sir Peregrine wished. Would Sir Peregrine think it well that he should prepare himself for the arduous duties of a master of hounds? Sir Peregrine did not think this at all well, but it did not appear that he himself was prepared with any immediate proposition. Then Peregrine discussed the matter with his mother, explaining that he had hoped at any rate to get the next winter's hunting with the H. H.;—which letters have represented the Hamworth Fox Hunt among sporting men for many years past. To this his mother made no objection, expressing a hope, however, that he would go abroad in the spring. 'Home-staying youths have ever homely wits,' she said to him, smiling on him ever so sweetly.

'That's quite true, mother,' he said. 'And that's why I should like to go to Leicestershire this winter.' But going to Leicestershire this winter was out of the question.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PERILS OF YOUTH.

GOING to Leicestershire was quite out of the question for young Orme at this period of his life, but going to London unfortunately was not so. He had become acquainted at Oxford with a gentleman of great skill in his peculiar line of life, whose usual residence was in the metropolis; and so great had been the attraction found in the character and pursuits of this skilful gentleman, that our hero had not been long at The Cleeve, after his retirement from the university, before he visited his friend. Cowcross Street, Smithfield, was the site of this professor's residence, the destruction of rats in a barrel was his profession, and his name was Carroty Bob. It is not my intention to introduce the reader to Carroty Bob in person, as circumstances occurred about this time which brought his intimacy with Mr. Orme to an abrupt conclusion. It would be needless to tell how our hero was induced to back a certain terrier, presumed to be the pride of Smithfield; how a great match came off, second only in importance to a contest for the belt of England; how money was lost and quarrels arose, and how Peregrine Orme thrashed one sporting gent within an inch of his life, and fought his way out of Carroty Bob's house at twelve o'clock at night. The tale of the row got into the newspapers, and of course reached The Cleeve. Sir Peregrine sent for his grandson into his study, and insisted on knowing everything;—how much money there was to pay, and what chance there might be of an action and damages. Of an action and damages there did not seem to be any chance, and the amount of money claimed was not large. Rats have this advantage, that they usually come cheaper than race-horses; but then, as Sir Peregrine felt sorely, they do not sound so well.

'Do you know, sir, that you are breaking your mother's heart?' said Sir Peregrine, looking very sternly at the young man—as sternly as he was able to look, let him do his worst.

Peregrine the younger had a very strong idea that he was not doing anything of the kind. He had left her only a quarter of an hour since; and though she had wept during the interview, she had forgiven him with many caresses, and had expressed her

opinion that the chief fault had lain with Carroty Bob and those other wretched people who had lured her dear child into their villainous den. She had altogether failed to conceal her pride at his having fought his way out from among them, and had ended by supplying his pocket out of her own immediate resources. 'I hope not, sir,' said Peregrine the younger, thinking over some of these things.

'But you will, sir, if you go on with this shameless career. I do not speak of myself. I do not expect you to sacrifice your tastes for me; but I did think that you loved your mother!'

'So I do;—and you too.'

'I am not speaking about myself, sir. When I think what your father was at your age;—how nobly——' And then the baronet was stopped in his speech, and wiped his eyes with his handkerchief. 'Do you think that your father, sir, followed such pursuits as *these*? Do you think that he spent his time in the pursuit of—rats?'

'Well; I don't know; I don't think he did. But I have heard you say, sir, that you sometimes went to cockfights when you were young.'

'To cockfights! well, yes. But let me tell you, sir, that I always went in the company of gentlemen—that is, when I did go, which was very seldom.' The baronet in some after-dinner half-hour had allowed this secret of his youth to escape from him, imprudently.

'And I went to the house in Cowcross Street with Lord John Fitzjoly.'

'The last man in all London with whom you ought to associate! But I am not going to argue with you, sir. If you think, and will continue to think, that the slaughtering of vermin is a proper pursuit——'

'But, sir, foxes are vermin also.'

'Hold your tongue, sir, and listen to me. You know very well what I mean, sir. If you think that—rats are a proper pursuit for a gentleman in your sphere of life, and if all that I can say has no effect in changing your opinion,—I shall have done. I have not many years of life before me, and when I shall be no more, you can squander the property in any vile pursuits that may be pleasing to you. But, sir, you shall not do it while I am living; nor, if I can help it, shall you rob your mother of such peace of mind as is left for her in this world. I have only one alternative for you, sir——' Sir Peregrine did not stop to explain what might be the other branch of this alternative. 'Will you give me your word of honour as a gentleman that you will never again concern yourself in this disgusting pursuit?'

'Never, grandfather!' said Peregrine, solemnly.

Sir Peregrine before he answered bethought himself that any

pledge given for a whole life-time must be foolish; and he bethought himself also that if he could wean his heir from rats for a year or so, the taste would perish from lack of nourishment. 'I will say for two years,' said Sir Peregrine, still maintaining his austere look.

'For two years!' repeated Peregrine the younger; 'and this is the fourth of October.'

'Yes, sir; for two years,' said the baronet, more angry than ever at the young man's pertinacity, and yet almost amused at his grandson's already formed resolve to go back to his occupation at the first opportunity allowed.

'Couldn't you date it from the end of August, sir? The best of the matches always come off in September.'

'No, sir; I will not date it from any other time than the present. Will you give me your word of honour as a gentleman, for two years?'

Peregrine thought over the proposition for a minute or two in sad anticipation of all that he was to lose, and then slowly gave his adhesion to the terms. 'Very well, sir;—for two years.' And then he took out his pocket-book and wrote in it slowly.

It was at any rate manifest that he intended to keep his word, and that was much; so Sir Peregrine accepted the promise for what it was worth. 'And now,' said he, 'if you have got nothing better to do, we will ride down to Crutchley Wood.'

'I should like it of all things,' said his grandson.

'Samson wants me to cut a new bridle-path through from the larches at the top of the hill down to Crutchley Bottom; but I don't think I'll have it done. Tell Jacob to let us have the nags; I'll ride the gray pony. And ask your mother if she'll ride with us.'

It was the manner of Sir Peregrine to forgive altogether when he did forgive; and to commence his forgiveness in all its integrity from the first moment of the pardon. There was nothing he disliked so much as being on bad terms with those around him, and with none more so than with his grandson. Peregrine well knew how to make himself pleasant to the old man, and when duly encouraged would always do so. And thus the family party, as they rode on this occasion through the woods of The Cleeve, discussed oaks and larches, beech and birches, as though there were no such animal as a rat in existence, and no such place known as Cowcross Street.

'Well, Perry, as you and Samson are both of one mind, I suppose the path must be made,' said Sir Peregrine, as he got off his horse at the entrance of the stable-yard, and prepared to give his feeble aid to Mrs. Orme.

Shortly after this the following note was brought up to The Cleeve by a messenger from Orley Farm:—

‘MY DEAR SIR PEREGRINE,

‘If you are quite disengaged at twelve o’clock to-morrow, I will walk over to The Cleeve at that hour. Or if it would suit you better to call here as you are riding, I would remain within till you come. I want your kind advice on a certain matter.

‘Most sincerely yours,

‘*Thursday.*’

‘MARY MASON.

Lady Mason, when she wrote this note, was well aware that it would not be necessary for her to go to The Cleeve. Sir Peregrine’s courtesy would not permit him to impose any trouble on a lady when the alternative of taking that trouble on himself was given to him. Moreover, he liked to have some object for his daily ride; he liked to be consulted ‘on certain matters;’ and he especially liked being so consulted by Lady Mason. So he sent word back that he would be at the farm at twelve on the following day, and exactly at that hour his gray pony or cob might have been seen slowly walking up the avenue to the farm-house.

The Cleeve was not distant from Orley Farm more than two miles by the nearest walking-path, although it could not be driven much under five. With any sort of carriage one was obliged to come from The Cleeve House down to the lodge on the Hamworth and Alston road, and then to drive through the town of Hamworth, and so back to the farm. But in walking one would take the path along the river for nearly a mile, thence rise up the hill to the top of Crutchley Wood, descend through the wood to Crutchley Bottom, and, passing along the valley, come out at the foot of Cleeve Hill, just opposite to Orley Farm Gate. The distance for a horseman was somewhat greater, seeing that there was not as yet any bridle-way through Crutchley Wood. Under these circumstances the journey between the two houses was very frequently made on foot; and for those walking from The Cleeve House to Hamworth the nearest way was by Lady Mason’s gate.

Lady Mason’s drawing-room was very pretty, though it was by no means fashionably furnished. Indeed, she eschewed fashion in all things, and made no pretence of coming out before the world as a great lady. She had never kept any kind of carriage, though her means, combined with her son’s income, would certainly have justified her in a pony-chaise. Since Lucius had become master of the house he had presented her with such a vehicle, and also with the pony and harness complete; but as yet she had never used it, being afraid, as she said to him with a smile, of appearing ambitious before the stern citizens of Hamworth. ‘Nonsense, mother,’ he had replied, with a considerable amount of young dignity in his face. ‘We are all entitled to those comforts for which we can afford to

pay without injury to any one. I shall take it ill of you if I do not see you using it.'

'Oh, Sir Peregrine, this is so kind of you,' said Lady Mason, coming forward to meet her friend. She was plainly dressed, without any full exuberance of costume, and yet everything about her was neat and pretty, and everything had been the object of feminine care. A very plain dress may occasion as much study as the most elaborate,—and may be quite as worthy of the study it has caused. Lady Mason, I am inclined to think, was by no means indifferent to the subject, but then to her belonged the great art of hiding her artifice.

'Not at all; not at all,' said Sir Peregrine, taking her hand and pressing it, as he always did. 'What is the use of neighbours if they are not neighbourly?' This was all very well from Sir Peregrine in the existing case; but he was not a man who by any means recognized the necessity of being civil to all who lived near him. To the great and to the poor he was neighbourly; but it may be doubted whether he would have thought much of Lady Mason if she had been less good looking or less clever.

'Ah! I know how good you always are to me. But I'll tell you why I am troubling you now. Lucius went off two days since to Liverpool.'

'My grandson told me that he had left home.'

'He is an excellent young man, and I am sure that I have every reason to be thankful.' Sir Peregrine, remembering the affair in Cowcross Street, and certain other affairs of a somewhat similar nature, thought that she had; but for all that he would not have exchanged his own bright-eyed lad for Lucius Mason with all his virtues and all his learning.

'And indeed I am thankful,' continued the widow. 'Nothing can be better than his conduct and mode of life; but——'

'I hope he has no attraction at Liverpool, of which you disapprove.'

'No, no; there is nothing of that kind. His attraction is——; but perhaps I had better explain the whole matter. Lucius, you know, has taken to farming.'

'He has taken up the land which you held yourself, has he not?'

'Yes, and a little more; and he is anxious to add even to that. He is very energetic about it, Sir Peregrine.'

'Well; the life of a gentleman farmer is not a bad one; though in his special circumstances I would certainly have recommended a profession.'

'Acting upon your advice I did urge him to go to the bar. But he has a will of his own, and a mind altogether made up as to the line of life which he thinks will suit him best. What I fear now

is, that he will spend more money upon experiments that he can afford.'

'Experimental farming is an expensive amusement,' said Sir Peregrine, with a very serious shake of his head.

'I am afraid it is; and now he has gone to Liverpool to buy — guano,' said the widow, feeling some little shame in coming to so inconsiderable a conclusion after her somewhat stately prologue.

'To buy guano! Why could he not get his guano from Walker, as my man Symonds does?'

'He says it is not good. He analyzed it, and——'

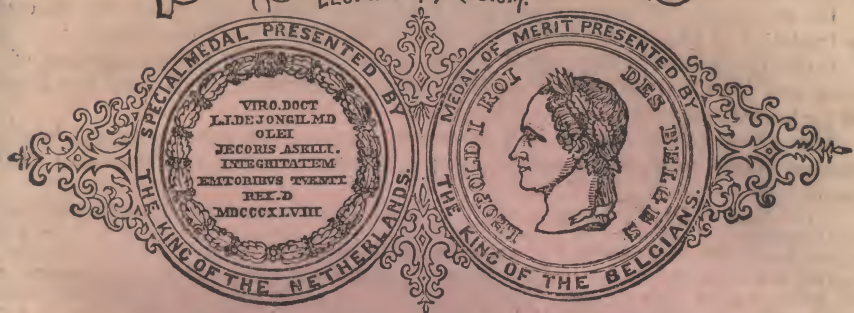
'Fiddlestick! Why didn't he order it in London, if he didn't like Walker's. Gone to Liverpool for guano! I'll tell you what it is, Lady Mason; if he intends to farm his land in that way, he should have a very considerable capital at his back. It will be a long time before he sees his money again.' Sir Peregrine had been farming all his life, and had his own ideas on the subject. He knew very well that no gentleman, let him set to work as he might with his own land, could do as well with it as a farmer who must make a living out of his farming besides paying the rent; —who must do that or else have no living; and he knew also that such operations as those which his young friend was now about to attempt was an amusement fitted only for the rich. It may be also that he was a little old fashioned, and therefore prejudiced against new combinations between agriculture and chemistry. 'He must put a stop to that kind of work very soon, Lady Mason; he must indeed; or he will bring himself to ruin—and you with him.'

Lady Mason's face became very grave and serious. 'But what can I say to him, Sir Peregrine? In such a matter as that I am afraid that he would not mind me. If you would not object to speaking to him?'

Sir Peregrine was graciously pleased to say that he would not object. It was a disagreeable task, he said, that of giving advice to a young man who was bound by no tie either to take it or even to receive it with respect.

'You will not find him at all disrespectful; I think I can promise that,' said the frightened mother: and that matter was ended by a promise on the part of the baronet to take the case in hand, and to see Lucius immediately on his return from Liverpool. 'He had better come and dine at The Cleeve,' said Sir Peregrine, 'and we will have it out after dinner.' All of which made Lady Mason very grateful.

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